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A
LETTER

TO

MR. BENSON,

CONTAINING

STRICTURES ON A PAMPHLET,

CALLED

A DEFENCE OF THE CONFERENCE,

SIGNED

A. MATHER, J. PAWSON, AND J. BENSON.

BY

THOMAS SHAW,

PREACHER OF THE GOSPEL,

LATE IN CONNEXION WITH THE REVEREND AND
CELEBRATED MR. JOHN WESLEY.

With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again.
St. Matt. Sermon on the Mount.



PRICE ONE PENNY.

1797.

ADVERTISEMENT.

MR. BENSON is the ablest polemical writer, perhaps, in the Methodist connexion. Some of my readers will probably say, Why do you make any strictures upon what you suppose he has written? Because I believe him to be but a man, engaged in affairs with others that are only but men. If St. Paul, or an angel from heaven, were to appear in the world, and write what I believe injurious to the church of Christ, I would, in the fear of God, by the help of the Spirit, humbly attempt to point out their errors.

May the Lord preserve and keep those that are right, and inform, reform, &c. those who are wrong! May he comfort the distressed; deliver the godly out of temptation; and make and keep the people called Methodists, so much of one mind, that they may live in this world, in union and godly love, and live in heavenly glory for ever, for Christ's sake, our only Lord and Saviour! Amen, and Amen.



A

L E T T E R,

Ec. Ec. Ec.

MR. BENSON,

YOU grace your title page with three texts of Scripture, 2 Cor. xi. 26.—Acts xx. 30.—Rom. xvi. 17.—“2 Cor. xi. 26.—In perils among false Brethren.” I ask who are so? Certainly not Messrs M. P. & B. But tho’ you stigmatize all your opposing Trustees with that base and false epithet, there is no danger either to your persons, or private property, or any christian grace ye are possessed of; nor is there any thing of your’s in danger thereby, except some wrong ambition, for wrong power, &c. And surely if ye were all stripped as clean of that as Micah was of his gods, when he cried out after his hired priest, and the Danites, Judges, xviii. 24. ye would not be a whit the worse.

Acts xx. 30. “Also of yourselves shall men arise speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” Yea, but it is Messrs M. and P. and also *you*, if you now join with them, as you seem to do here, that literally rise among ourselves, speaking perverse things against the trustees, &c. wanting to draw all the Methodists after you as your disciples; and as you fail in success ye do not fail to vent your anger.

Rom. xvi. 17. "We beseech you, brethren, mark those that cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which you have learned, and avoid them." Yes, but it is you that cause the divisions, by making the union either impossible, or improper; because unscriptural. And I know no divisions contrary to the doctrine they have learned. No! no! it is your usurped power; ye would have them learn to submit and obey, and they refuse so to unman and unchristian themselves; which, by so doing, they certainly would, to their eternal shame and disgrace. But rather may ye be ashamed (now before it be too late) of placing these texts in the front of this performance. On proper applicable occasions, they would be as apples of gold in pictures of silver, but here they are as unapplicable as jewels in a swine's snout.

P. 4. l. 1. &c. "The people view the preachers as the Painites view the kings, princes, nobles, &c. of the earth, viz. as tyrants, &c." O! why do you strive to inflame the people, by comparing yourselves to the kings, princes, &c. of the earth? Unless ye are determined barefacedly now, Pope-like, to persevere in attempting to set up temporal and spiritual dominion together over the Methodists.

L. 38. "Have been employed forty years in the sole work of calling sinners to repentance." I say not in that sole work, &c. Mr. M. working his way to get into Mr. Wesley's department, the first conference after his decease, was not calling sinners to repentance. Neither was that company going to Litchfield, and staying at a ——— to lay out the kingdoms into dioceses, and make yourselves bishops over them, at all like the sole work of a Methodist preacher, calling sinners to repentance, &c.

P. 5. l. 48. "Brought these to obtain mercy." What! by this tyrannical oppressive system? No, no! Mr. B. not by what is wrong in you now, any more than the three thousand were converted at Jerusalem by St. Peter's dissimulation at Antioch, a long time afterwards. Gal. 2. ii. &c. But by the power of God for the sake of Jesus Christ, in the use of those means he has appointed; as those were at Jerusalem, Acts 2. xxvii. And also those in the house of Cornelius, x. 34. under Peter's preaching. O! Mr. B. what good could you expect to do by this colouring, if you succeed with your design upon your readers, by cozening them out of their understanding, by crying out?

P. 6. l. 18. "And they must really have patience with us, if we cannot suddenly be prevailed upon to desert this old tried and beaten road, &c. &c. &c." If it were with you according to these plausible words, I would say so too, Mr. Benson: But then, as you set up turnpike bars with impositions, &c. across this road, use the passengers, and apply the toll as you please, &c. and all without an Act of Parliament by, or from the Methodists, it is certainly right for any one concerned to do as an honest farmer did, to a turnpike-gate literally; when he knew the pretended proprietors had no Act of Parliament, he took a carpenter with him, and when they refused to open it without toll, he ordered him to cut it down, and throw it out of the way; then he drove forward his waggon, without regarding the threatenings of the keeper. O Mr. B. ! how can you, in the face of the world, and before knowing, religious people, yea, and in the presence of Almighty God, thus go on to declare ye

follow the old plan ? When you know in your own conscience ye do no such things. You paint and colour, cast into shade some parts, then colour again ; and all who know you, must know you are a master at this art. But oh ! Mr. B. the old proverb—"Honesty is the best policy ;" will be so at last.

P. 7. l. 50. "To effect an alteration of the first and fundamental principles of their union." Where ever did he endeavour such a thing ? I cannot find it. And the rules you speak of were continually broken by yourselves, as you very well know ; as well about printing and selling books for different preachers, &c. as other things ; and the lists of postage, &c. paid at quarter days, the over bearing preachers either settling all themselves, or by the stewards their creatures. And all other rules ye have meant, or do mean to bind *some* by, have been, and are broken to this day. And the new rules continually made, supplant the good old ones ; therefore by telling thus how ye promised, &c. they will see how ye have, and do equivocate ; for ye all in general are as deep in the mud as he is in the mire : and worse, as ye practise with impunity and expel him for doing, or attempting something contrary to your minds.

P. 9. l. 48 "He stood up again with the preachers agreeing to the plan left by Mr. Wesley." If ye all stood up in token of solemn confirmation of such determinations, did ye not render yourselves worthy of——; and if it had been in a civil cause in court, would ye not all have been liable to the pillory ? For ye call standing up at these times, the same as taking the strongest oaths. But then ye never all did, nor intended to abide by and keep

them all. But the plain truth is, his fault, for which ye punish him to the utmost of your power, is his not submitting to you, with all your faults together. As supposing the church of England clergymen to expell a rector from his living, for not keeping or not believing one of the 39 articles: when suppose not one of them all, believe or keep 30 out of 39. O! Mr. B. you know how applicable this is.

P. 11. l. 6. "But enquiries like these do not trouble him nor any like minded, &c. &c." As ye are equally guilty (if it be guilt) of pursuing new schemes, it is a subject of controversy whether theirs, or yours, be most like wood, hay, stubble, &c. And certainly it will be given in their favour after the day of judgment shall have consumed all human policy and power; for Christ is *now*, and God will *then be*, *sole head* of his church there: And has ordered it, so to be here. But ye are transgressors like the Israelites, 1 Sam. xii. 17. They would be like other nations: So ye are striving to be as bad as other churches, &c. have been, by setting up yourselves to be kings in our Israel. Remember Christ has absolutely forbidden it. *Call no man Father, &c.* But ye blame them for new schemes, &c. which is what ye have been, and are still endeavouring for yourselves; yea, professedly (Mather's addenda) by all your new schemes. At this kind of work ye all are dexterous: But throughout this pamphlet you surpass your brethren who published before you, as much as your abilities are greater than theirs; as every discerning reader must observe. But you will not be able to turn off the dreadful wages for it at last. Rev. xxii. 18. No! tho' you are cunning, God is all wisdom.

L. 17. "Who cause divisions, &c. Rom. xvi. 17." If ye could prove these trustees, &c. the cause, then this text would be applicable to them; but till then it stays with yourselves. For the church of England may with as good a grace, apply it to all the Methodist preachers and people, and to all the Dissenters; yea, and the church of Rome may apply the same text as properly to all Protestants.

P. 12. When you had coloured, exaggerated, and strained to the very uttermost you cried out, "Oh! Brethren! but we spare him. God be merciful to him!" Yes, like a certain person sparing his antagonist, when he could not strike another blow; so wherein have ye spared him, when ye could have punished worse?

P. 14. l. 23. "But paid before they had been consulted." This is palliating, and explaining away what Mr. R's. letter shewed was really wrong, and arbitrary in them. How can we trust them, either with power or money? When we see they will do as they please, and what they please with it. To ye, or to Mr. R. is it most proper to exclaim in your poet's words. *Quo teneam vultus mutantem protea noto?*

L. 41. "But where the mistake is, in this case, we confess we are not able to determine." The more ye stir in this affair the worse it looks: ye have printed it several times over. Now, if ye want to clear the persons, through whose hands it went, why do you not shew the account of every circuit, Kingswood's collection for that year, and add them up? Then if you find ye had the sum total, after you thought you had lost 80l. ye are right; if not, ye cannot make the black-a-moor white by all your

washings: No, it will be according to its grain, nature, and features.

P. 19. l. 12. "What then becomes of his 107l. &c." Take this whole affair together, and ye have neither proved his statement of the preachers stipends wrong, nor get yourselves any credit by attempting it: for by striving to invalidate it, ye have caused stricter examinations to take place, which have proved it too clearly upon yourselves, as you Mr. B. very well know.

P. 22. l. 24. "We proceed steadily on in the way in which we have walked for fifty or sixty years." You have exclaimed about truth, &c. I am sorry to have to appeal to your conscience, and every one's knowledge, who knows any thing about the Methodists, is there any truth at all in this? Has not, for instance, Dr. C. Mr. M. &c. turned in their modes, &c. from south to north, from north to west, then east, and south again, &c. From woollen to linen, from coat to cassock, from gown to coat again, &c. And there is no doubt, when such men cannot turn the wind to their sails, they will set their sails to the wind: Blow from what quarter or point of the compass it may. O! power, &c. How enchanting! But Mr. B. I could not have believed you would have written so, to help such men?

P. 23. l. 16. "We remain still on the old ground, &c." If your meaning be literally in old England, very well; but if the Methodist economy, the same assertions over and over again, do not prove it. Surely you wrote this pamphlet in the hours, and under the powers of darkness! May God Almighty send a Nathan to you, after all these proofs, of the effects of wrong looks from the house

top of ambition, destroying, or wanting to destroy, so many Uriah's, by Joab-like, exposing them to the power of the enemies of all Israel. And also, Joab-like, with Amasa, &c. O! I wish ye may have repentance, and also, that the sword (of contention) may not continue all your lives, as it did to David. I am surpris'd you did write so: First, because your conscience, and the spirit of God must have been so much resisted before you could break through. Secondly, because every one may see your bad cause, except themselves touched the magic wand. If they have, Elisha had need to speak again, *Is it time to receive, &c.*

P. 25. "Now being ignorant, as it appeared, why the Pope's Edicts were termed Bulls."

This also is a lower kind of equivocation than I ever thought you would have stooped to; for, if so, he must have been ignorant indeed! which does not appear in his writing, as he brings in many eminent church historians. But the Pope's Edicts have (by custom, in practice for ages) been termed as he represented them, and hieroglyphically have commonly been drawn so: See Moor's Almanack, 1796. All Protestants know that those Bulla's have, by their breath, kindled the fires of persecution, wherever they had power to breathe: Of this you cannot be ignorant; therefore, to attempt to turn it to ridicule, is real craft in you.

And now as those from Rome are become as placid in England, as English game-cocks and bulldogs are, when taken into distant nations, your Bulla's from London, or Leeds, &c. &c. &c. do not fail to blow the same kind of breath, according to the strength ye can inspire them with.

For instance, if the Pope's Bulla ordered it, the churches were shut up, their dead might not be buried, but lay strewed above ground like rotten sheep; the land might not be tilled, &c. all cursed: If any disobeyed, burned, &c. Now look at the effects of your Bulla's; chapel at Chester, &c. &c. &c. All who will not submit, turned out of bread, out of house, out of their property in the funds: In a word, cursed with all the power ye have. Would ye have us charitably say, ye would do no worse?

P. 25. l. 39. "Why does he seek to labour amongst us? How is it consistent with religion, &c.?"

You should rather have said, how could he leave his fathers and brethren, &c. without informing, and remonstrating, &c. with them: Certainly that man could have little or no love to his dear and near relations, if he could leave them without strong reasons, or at all, without absolute necessity! O! Mr. B. how would you shew your love to your father, brethren, &c.? The weakness of your argument proves the badness of your cause; and it is plain, you strive to darken counsel by your multitude of words.

P. 25. l. 42. "Why does not he voluntarily withdraw, and separate himself from us?"

Yes, that is the very thing ye want, we know it full well. It is the common cry with all who are doing what they love, but what injuriously affect others: So ye want not to be disturbed, till you have erected your image in the plains of Dura, or your tower in the plains of Babylon, and cemented it firmly with the slime of the country. But Jehovah, I trust, will confound you. That no Nimrod, whether from the sterile north, or any of the four

winds, shall ever proceed fully to erect a despotic empire among the sons of our Noah.

All you have said in three pages about Mr. K. contradicting himself, &c. comparing his different pamphlets, written at different times, and on different subjects, falls entirely to the ground. And indeed, from you, Mr. B. it shews retalliation: Because Mr. K. has shewn how manifestly you have contradicted yourself, by standing against him, bringing your own arguments against yourself, found in abundance in your own sermons, and polemic writings, against Dr. Tatham, Mr. Ruffel, &c. And also Mr. Bradburn, who is known to be the strongest defender of liberty, both civil and religious, of any among the Methodists: If what he has preached and written is to be taken for any thing. And indeed every Methodist preacher, or minister of the gospel of any denomination, who knows any thing as he ought to know, will plead for Christian and English liberty.

But now to serve your purposes against these trustees, &c. you seem to court what has been called Church and King mobs, at Birmingham, &c. in our blessed land of liberty. O fie, M. P. and B. fie!

P. 29. "Whether Thomas Paine's or Alexander Kilham's mushroom productions, or the less noted pigmy tribe of scriblers of Salford, Ashton, &c. we care not, we say, &c."——Ah, ah! Mr. B. Is this you? I think it is more like M. or P. or rather indeed, an aged and enraged, and baffled Pope or D——! What common sense (not to mention piety, charity, or any other christian grace, or virtue) is there here? So! as far as in you lies, ye couple together T. Paine, A. Kilham, with all your brethren, the local preachers, trustees, &c. &c. &c.

who will not bend under Nimrod, or bow, &c. in the plains of Dura; then clothe, as it were, in bear-skins, and invite the dogs to worry them. If you say this is too strong, I say, not at all; for ye know how obnoxious Paine is to the government, and by comparing them together, (as far as ye could) ye have exposed them to the rage of their country. And if an enraged, enflamed country catch such a report, and do mischief, there may be a plea of ignorance, or inconsiderateness for them: But for you, there is no excuse.

T. Paine, A. Kilham, Salford and Ashton trustees, &c. pigmy tribe of scriblers!

Surely it would not have been so grating, if it had come from a satirical buffoon! But from a divine of the most holy profession, or sect, in England, in Europe, or the whole world!!! O how it grates!

You go on saying, "We are not sure but it will be abundantly the best, that persons of this description should leave us."

Yes, your schemes may prompt you to think so: But remember what I say: if ye force them away from you, as Saul did David, by throwing javelins at them;—if the kingdom of grace be taken from you, as the kingdom of Israel was from Saul, though he troubled David for a while, on the mountains, &c. as ye do these Davids now; yet ye will have no good reason to triumph, that ye have made some few inconsiderate people believe, forsooth, (because they believe what ye wrote without thinking for themselves) that A. K. &c. are to the preachers called Conference, what T. Paine, (or rather though they do not say so) what C. Fox is to the nation. O! beware in time.

P. 30. l. 1. "That good deposit of Methodism, committed to our care by our late venerable father, we hope still to keep," &c.

It is not your least crime, thus making a stalking horse of that reverend character: If it were lawful to suffer my indignation to rise at any thing, certainly it would be at you, thus attempting to blind the people by raising, as it were, his spectre before them, to cover your designs. For, as often as ye repeat it, I say again, ye do no such thing! Unless ye will go on tempting us to believe, and at last provoke us to say, that you have your own meaning when you say so: Which must be the temporal property, and the honour, and power, which is, or by your schemes ye want to annex to it. You know best; but, if this be your meaning, ye are poor, mean, and vile.

At last, Mr. Pawson has given the finishing stroke to this piece, by an addenda to make it quite complete. This he has done, by exposing the number in society in the different circuits where Mr. K. laboured as a travelling preacher. At last he exclaims, in *derision*, they were instrumental of increasing the societies, no less than——(*the number is down*). But unfortunately by so doing, he has exposed to discouragement, if not also to contempt, all those travelling preachers, for being guilty with Mr. K. in all these circuits; of sometimes lessening, and at other times and places, not much increasing the societies.

Messrs. W. Dufton, G. Mowet, Thomas Ellis, P. Mill, J. Atkins, T. Dixon, Isaac Brown, W. Percival, J. Gaultier, J. Cownly, J. Anderson, J. Watson, Joseph Sanderon, Thomas Vasey, William Fenwick, S. Eversfield, and Robert Swan.

Some of these several times over, so that in future when the people see any of these names set down for their circuits, they will be sending post-haste back to conference, that not one of them may come to them: and if he gets into a circuit at all, those who should, and otherwise would have been his friends, will be looking at him as an intruder, instead of Christ's, and the church's messenger. So, instead of hearing his preaching, &c. as disciples, such will hearken as critics, to find some fault, &c. Consequently his ministry will be dry and barren to such. So they may say of him to others, *he is a poor dry tool—one of those that go to fill up places, &c.* But if the other think otherwise, he or she, will say: *Nay, I am not mistaken, friends, I assure you, for you may find his name in Mr. Pawson's list of unworthies: Kilham's partners.*

That this may be of some use, by preventing evil, and doing good, by the blessing of Almighty God, with sincere respect for you, Mr. Benson, is the desire and prayer of your

Affectionate Brother, and humble Servant,

THOS. SHAW.

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